DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 082 SP 021 875

AUTHOR Tinning, Richard I.
TITLE Supervision of Student Teaching: A Behavioral Critique.
PUB DATE Feb 83
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Feedback; Higher Education; Leadership Styles; Positive Reinforcement; Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teacher Relationship; Student Teachers; *Student Teacher Supervisors; *Student Teaching; *Supervisory Methods; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Response; *Teacher Supervision

ABSTRACT

Literature on the efficacy of university faculty as supervisors of student teachers reveals the general opinion that university supervisors have a low impact on student teachers, and that their role is secondary to that of cooperating teachers. A cause for this is the lack of training to help student teachers respond appropriately to certain classroom stimuli. There is also a tendency for supervisor advice to be generalized across settings with little understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of classroom environments. Another cause of low impact is quality and quantity of feedback, often delayed and infrequent, which is given to the student teacher. Reinforcers contrived by the supervisor tend to be of insufficient potency to offset the natural occurring reinforcers in the classroom, and accurate detailed specifications of appropriate student teacher behavior are often absent. Supervisors also fail to take an accurate record of student teacher behavior; this inaccurate recordkeeping results in a weak accountability system. (JD)

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ED227082

Supervision of student teaching: A behavioral critique.

February, 1983

Richard I. Tinning

School of Education
Deakin University
Geelong, Victoria 3217
Australia

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Supervision of student teaching is, for the most part, an unglamorous ingredient in most teacher training programs. Supervision is typically undertaken by both college/university personnel and cooperating teachers, but for the purpose of this paper, discussion will be limited to consideration of the college/university supervisor. While Turney (1977) claimed that "perhaps the greatest shortcoming of teaching practice lies in the supervision of the student's work with a class" (p. 45) and although the cooperating teacher must share part of the criticism, it is the supervising effectiveness of the college supervisor which has drawn the most criticism in analyses of student teaching. Locke (1979) believes that college supervisors play no significant role at all in student teaching, and Morris (1974) asserts that it is impossible to distinguish the effects of the university supervisor on the performance and adjustment of student teachers. Patty (1973) predicted that the cooperating teacher would usurp the college supervisor's function, and Bowman (1979) has blatantly called for the elimination of college supervision from the student teaching program.

Although the college supervisor fulfills many roles other than instructional supervision (Zimpher et al., 1980), it is the role of the supervisor in improving the teaching effectivess of the intern which will be of concern within this discussion. Lindsey (1970) argues that for supervisors, their "primary function is that of teaching the novice about teaching" and in this sense supervision of student teachers can be seen as a special species of teaching. If we accept Gage's (1978) definition that teaching is "any activity on the part of one person to facilitate learning on the part of another" (p. 14), then Dussault's (1970) phrase "supervision as teaching" seems appropriate.

Since teaching is essentially concerned with behavior change, considering "supervision as teaching" from a behavior analysis perspective is considered to be instructive.

Factors affecting the effectiveness of "supervision as teaching"

Discrimination

Let me use the example of Kounin's (1970) concept of "withitness" to illustrate how the impact of instructional supervision is limited. Management skills are often a focus of a supervisor's instructional feedback and "withitness" is a concept of management which is frequently addressed in the interaction between supervisor and intern. Withitness was defined by Kounin (1970) "as a teacher's communicating to the children by her actual behavior....that she knows what the children are doing, or has the proverbial "eyes in the back of her head" (p. 81).

Typical conference advice might sound like this:

Supervisor: "You need to be more aware of what all the kids in the class are doing. Too often, when you are monitoring one child's work, others in the class are misbehaving. You really need to develop eyes in the back of your head."

Intern: "But how can I watch all the kids at once? There is just so much going on at any moment I don't know where to start."

Supervisor: "Sure. It really is impossible to literally see everyone at the same time but you should create an impression such that the class think you can see them all. To do this you need to pick out a few incidents of misbehavior while you are in the process of, say, monitoring, and desist them immediately. If you continue to do this, soon the class will think you have "eyes in the back of your head."

Intern: "O.K. I'll try."

Supervisor: "You must remember that your desists must be correct in terms of identifying the right target (was it really Johnny who caused Mary to drop the

> ball?), and also they must be given at the right time before the misbehavior gets worse or involves others. Work on that and I'll see you again next week."

In essence, this supervisor has told the intern that he needs to discriminate inappropriate behaviors and intervene to stop them. The problem arises where the intern is given no real assistance in learning to discriminate. Discrimination is the restriction of responding to certain stimulus situations and not others (Sulzer-Zazroff & Mayer, 1977).For most student teachers, learning to make appropriate discriminations is a trial and error process, with associated inefficiency. Although a technology for discrimination training has been developed and practiced extensively elsewhere (Stokes & Baer, 1977), its application within teacher training is largely non-existent. While it is understood that discrimination training for the complex phenomenon of teaching presents more logistical problems than discrimination training in a laboratory setting, it behooves teacher educators to recognize the potential importance of such training for developing chosen teaching skills in interns.

Natural and contrived reinforcers

One consistent finding of the research on student teaching is that interns "go with" teaching procedures that work on a lesson-by-lesson basis even when such procedures are at variance with the rhetoric and/or expectations of the university training program (see Iannaccone, 1963; Tabachnick et al., 1978; Popkewitz, 1977; and Zimpher et al., 1980). In other words, interns' teaching behaviors come under the stimulus control of powerful natural reinforcers which are present in the classroom environment.

Skinner (1974 & 1982) distinguished between natural and contrived reinforcers and explained how much of education is dependent upon the use of contrived reinforcers; for example...."there are no natural consequences which can be efficiently used to shape the early stages of reading or writing" (1982), p. 4). In the case of student teaching, contrived reinforcers such as a supervisor's positive feedback, assessment or recommendation are less powerful than the natural reinforcers which operate within the classroom. Doyle

(1977) alluded to this issue when he argued that much of what a teacher does in a classroom is done to achieve the cooperation of the pupils and that performance expectations are traded for such cooperation. For a student teacher to ignore pupil cooperation and doggedly seek to please a supervisor when it is clear that the supervisor expectations are inappropriate within that particular setting is tantamount to classroom suicide.

However, teacher behavior developed only by responding to immediate classroom reinforcement (e.g., cooperation) may often be limiting. Consider an example of a physical education student teacher who has his class working in one large group for an activity, which by its nature, requires pupils to perform one after another. The result of such class organization is that there is a great deal of wait time and very few opportunities to respond for each pupil. A supervisor might suggest that the class be organized into four smaller groups to facilitate more activity time for each child. When the student first tries this grouping procedure he finds that monitoring the groups is difficult and, in order to prevent an increase in inappropriate pupil behavior (and a consequent "loss of control" of the class), the student quickly reverts to the "comfort" of the large class group. Said another way, the intern is responding to the powerful immediate natural reinforcers within the classroom setting rather than to the contrived deferred reinforcer of supervisor approval. The problem with such a response is that it may very well be less effective in the long term. To persevere with smaller group organization and its possible management problems may (if the supervisor is correct) result in more opportunities for pupil response and less inappropriate pupil behavior. To this end the "going with what works" trial and error philosophy is seen to have limitations with respect to improving intern teaching effectiveness.

Supervisors do, by and large, have advice for their interns which they believe will help the intern teach better. As shown above, problems arise

when deferred benefits are seen by the intern to not be appropriate immediately. But there is also a problem of relevance of advice to the particular setting in which the intern is teaching. This is a problem of the generalizability of supervisor advice across settings.

Generalizability in different contexts

A great deal has been recently learned about the influence of setting contexts on what is possible for an intern to do. Copeland (1978 & 79) found that the persistence of microteaching skills across settings (i.e., into student teaching) "can be most reasonably understood in terms of the ecological system in the classroom in which the student teacher attempts subsequent use of the skill" (1979, p. 178). Doyle (1977) found that student teachers often behaved in ways that are incongruent with the demands of the environment and that

> "It is possible....that the classroom environment is a substantially more important factor in shaping teacher behavior than has been conventionally recognized and that some teaching skills only become usable after the teacher has first mastered classroom demands" (p. 54).

It is probable that supervisors fail to realize the power of the classroom in shaping student teacher behavior and, as a result, set inappropriate expectations for their interms. Also it is likely that supervisors fail to understand the idiosyncratic nature of particular classrooms in which their interns are placed and expect certain behaviors to generalize across all settings. Moxley (1982) has provided a useful model of the influence of context on behavior. Specific behaviors (say of a student teacher) can best be understood in the context not only of the immediate interaction events but also in the context of what Moxley called "temporary ongoing activity events" (such as what is provided for an activity, i.e., materials, and what general activity

pupils are engaged in, e.g., free play, reading, etc.), and "enduring setting events" (such as how is a room laid out, e.g., seats in rows, centers, etc., and the existing social climate with the school and the classroom). Given the infrequent occurrence of supervisor visits to observe their interns, it is understandable that their knowledge of the context of the class will be limited. If supervisors worked on an extended basis within one school (and even better, within one classroom) some of this problem might be alleviated.

Latency and Frequency of Feedback

The issue of the infrequent occurrence of supervisor visits has other significant effects on the impact of "supervision as teaching" in addition to context understanding. In order for instruction to be effective, feedback must be given as soon as possible after the performance and it must be given frequently. On both counts of latency and frequency of feedback, supervisors typically display less than adequate responses. Often, with student teaching, feedback from the supervisor is delayed until a convenient break in instruction (perhaps recess time or lunch) and is seldom given almost immediately following the focused response. In most practical situations, feedback would not be possible until at least the conclusion of the lesson and to the extent that such extended latency exists, the effect of the feedback will subsequently be reduced.

Perhaps the frequency of feedback is an even more significant influence on the impact of "supervision as teaching" than is the latency between behavior and reinforcement. Typically, a number of days and many individual lessons separate supervisor observations of an intern's teaching. The effect of a particular piece of feedback from one lesson (like the earlier example of "withitness") may not be observed until perhaps five subsequent lessons have been taught by the intern, and consequently the events which have influenced the success or failure of the suggestion are seldom observed. The supervisor is often left to accept the intern's interpretation of why something "just

didn't work" or to simply attempt to "fill in the gap" himself. In either case, an adequate understanding by the supervisor of the contingencies operating during the intern's teaching is necessarily limited and as a consequence the appropriateness of the instructional advice given to the intern is also necessarily limited.

Accountability

Part of the low impact of "supervision as teaching" might be explained by an understanding of the accountability system operating within student teaching. According to Skinner (1974), accountability exists when one person is "keeping an account of the behavior of another to see whether it meets expectations" (p. 84). When one is held accountable, one is bound or obligated to behave in a certain manner because of the consequences of such behavior. Within student teaching, accountability is often inadequately conceived and weakly administered. Too often accurate accounts of an intern's teaching behaviors are not kept by the supervisor and detailed specifications of required behaviors are not explicit at the outset. In theory, the contrived consequences for failing to meet specifications in student teaching are failure to pass or perhaps an extended or repeated period of practice. However, few students ever fail student teaching and the actual consequences are far less significant. It is difficult for a supervisor to judge (and defend the judgment) a student who has failed to meet specifications if the details of specifications are vague and if no account is kept of behaviors to compare with specifications.

If certain contrived reinforcers, such as supervisor assessment, are to have an influence on the behavior of interns in student teaching that is strong enough to overcome the powerful natural reinforcers which exist in the classroom, then the issue of accountability is of vital importance. Consider again the example given earlier of the conference in which the supervisor advises

the intern to desist inappropriate pupil behavior while monitoring another student's work. If the supervisor is to hold the intern accountable for learning this withitness behavior, an explicit specification of the task, an accurate record of behavior, and an arrangement of contingencies would be required. The term 'task"in this context refers to a set of instructions about what the intern is expected to do to cope successfully with the situation of desisting (Doyle, 1981). According to Alexander (1982), keeping an account of another's behavior to see whether it meets specifications will only affect the likelihood of task accomplishment when coupled with the reliable arrangement of the contingencies. The arrangement of contingencies (meaning the contingencies of reinforcement, Skinner, 1969) must specify three things: 1) the occasion upon which a response occurs, 2) the response itself, and 3) the reinforcing consequences. In this example the arranged reinforcing consequences must be more powerful than the natural reinforcing consequences of possible alternative behaviors.

Just as Tousignant (1982) found that stated tasks were inappropriate as an explanation of what pupils learn in physical education lessons, so it may be that stated tasks in supervision (that is, what is stated that interns should do) is inappropriate as an explanation of what they do learn. Many tasks within student teaching might best be described as contingency developed tasks (Tousignant, 1982) which are dependent upon natural rather than contrived consequences. The nature of tasks within student teaching awaits research.

Conclusion

The low impact of "supervision as teaching" has many causes, among which are those identified in this paper. In particular, there is no specific discrimination training to help interns respond appropriately to certain classroom

stimuli; there is a tendency for supervisor advice to be generalized across settings with little understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of classroom environments; feedback given to the intern by the supervisor is both delayed and infrequent; contrived reinforcers tend to be of insufficient potency to offset natural occurring reinforcers; accurate detailed specifications of appropriate intern teaching behavior are often absent and supervisors fail to take an accurate record of intern teaching behavior resulting in a weak accountability system. A continuance of such imprecision with regard to "supervision as teaching" might well increase the probability that Patty's (1973) prediction that the role of the college supervisor will be usurped by the cooperating teacher will soon be a reality. Enough is now known about behavior change which could greatly improve the effectiveness of supervision as teaching. The question might boil down to whether the consequences for continuing the low impact intervention become aversive enough to act as a stimulus for change.

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